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Altar Fires

Ruth Bassett Eddy



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Book 11

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ALTAR FIRES

ALTAR FIRES

BY

RUTH BASSETT EDDY



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BOSTON

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IN LOVING THOUGHT OF
MY MOTHER

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ALTAR FIRES

FOR LOVE OF YOU

For love of you, sweetheart, the sky smiles down
 Upon a world so wonderful and fair;
Its heart is warm beneath its winter gown—
 Warm as the sun that through the crystal air
Tossing its rays like some exultant king,
 Laughs in its joy from out God's dazzling blue,
Kissing my eyes lest they be sorrowing
 For love of you, sweetheart, for love of you.

For love of you, sweetheart, the stars at night
 Shake out their gleams above like golden maize.
The tender message of the still moonlight
 Is fraught with stirring thoughts of other days.
The world seems waiting—waiting for your voice
 To send a thrill of life its great soul through;
All nature tunes itself unto my choice
 For love of you, sweetheart, for love of you.

For love of you, sweetheart, life's darkest side
 Has still a ray of hope to light the way;
The birds their secrets to the breeze confide
 That spring but slumbers and awaits their lay

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To free the restless earth by ice entombed,
And with the vital kiss of early dew
To rouse it, like a glorious maid, full-bloomed,—
For love of you, sweetheart, for love of you.

For love of you, sweetheart, pain sheathes its sting
Within the velvet of your faith in me :
Above to-day's sharp thorns the roses cling—
To-morrow's blooms, from every fetter free.
The hours of grim discouragement I bear,
For God must give me strength to live them through :
And I am brave enough to call life fair—
For love of you, sweetheart, for love of you.

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LAST HOURS

Stay near to me, my own, I fear the gloom
And dread the long, deep shadows of the night ;
I fear the coming of the pallid dawn,
Its miseries and heartaches yet unborn.
I want you near me in the darkened room,
And with your lips upon my lips close pressed
To say good night—and lay me down to rest.

Stay near to me, O love, I need you so
To help me keep unbroken that poor trust
That feels sore shaken at the battle's cry !
I am too weary now to still defy
The bitter promptings of the heart's dire woe.
God gave me trust in Him—I've kept it bright
All thro' life's struggle—but I fear to-night.

Stay near, O dearest of my heart, stay near !
Take these two helpless hands within your own
And let my tired head lie on your breast ;
Your arms' dear haven quiets my unrest.
So, in this hour, my trust in God I keep
And say good-bye—and lay me down to sleep.

ALTAR FIRES

COMPANIONSHIP

If thou wouldst leave the world that men call fair,
And delve into its sadder mystery,
Go not alone—uncertainty is there,
But take thou me.

If thou forget thyself and long to go
Away from Fortune's smile, which shines on thee—
Thro' every grief that 'tis thy fate to know,
Oh, take thou me!

And in the sacrifice, if thou shouldst gain
A deeper knowledge of the things to be,
The saddest lesson in the keenest pain,
Oh, teach to me.

And if thy mission blessings for thee reap,
I ask no share of gifts held dear by thee,
If, through the years, e'er sacred thou wilt keep
Thy love for me.

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MY HONEY

The heart of me is wanting you, is wanting you, my
honey,

The soul of me looks to the God you cry to in your
prayers

To care for you through lonely hours and keep your
dear heart sunny,

And free from sins that linger near to catch you in
their snares.

The heart of me is starving for the ripple of your
laughter,

The light within your happy eyes that makes day's
great orb dim,

Your wooing voice that prattles on about God's glad
hereafter,

As if we all were pure as you and blessed alike by
Him.

The heart of me is yearning for the pressure of your
fingers,

Like tender doves warm nestling there within this
palm of mine;

And when you draw your hand away the magic thrill
still lingers,

And trembles through my warm, young blood and
stirs as it were wine.

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Oh, honey, must these longing arms but empty air be
clasping?

Or is your dear head weary for a pillow on my
breast?

I'd hold the precious burden while a question I'd be
asking,

And seeking for in eyes that feared their own love to
attest.

I know your rosy mouth will have to give me brimming
measure

Of kisses when I bend my head, your shy consent to
prove.

The heart of me is wanting you, to cherish and to
treasure—

The soul of me is drooping for the sunshine of your
love!

ALTAR FIRES

UNREST

Where the winds blow soft with a perfume rare,
And the wild flowers droop in their rapt delight,
Where the hazy stars with a lazy stare
Shine down on the vastness of the night—
Out with the voice of God's minstrelsy,
'Tis there I'd be—'tis there I'd be!

Out of the mad, exultant game
With a heart at stake and a love run wild,
With passionate eyes and mouth aflame,
Into a land that is undefiled;
By love unstirred—like a placid sea,
'Tis there I'd be—'tis there I'd be!

Light as a bird in the fragrant blue
Sailing at peace with fleet wings outspread,
Joyously trilling the whole day through,
Pointing its course where sweet fancy led,
Where the world is my own and is God's and is
free,—
'T is there I'd be—'t is there I'd be!

ALTAR FIRES

I LOVE YOU SO

I only want to love you, life at best
Is fraught with pain and longing and unrest ;
But in its love for you my spirit lifts
Into joy's rarest ether all life's gifts.
You lead the way and I will gladly go
And e'er be quite content—I love you so.

When you are near, the world bursts from its gloom,
And flowers are glad to live and glad to bloom.
As placid sea reflects the star-gemmed sky
Above its mirror-surface, so do I
Reflect within my heart each joy, each woe
That comes into your life—I love you so.

I live to love while you, but love to live—
You well may take for I—I want to give.
The golden sun shines bright on every flower
And gives each tree and shrub its golden dower ;
Be like the sun—and none will ever know
One little flower you shine on loves you so !

ALTAR FIRES

AU DESESPOIR

There's a place in my heart that I've tried all day
To patch and mend with the tools at hand—
Pleasure and music have had their way
But the wound is there. Do you understand
Just the need I have to look in your eyes
And feel your lips on my lips to-night?
When the warmth of your hand on my own hand lies
In my soul there is peace, in my heart there is light.

I need your love in my life to stay,
And your word's low tone in my longing ear.
There's a place in my heart I must mend to-day,
For the wound is there and the night is near.
Do you feel me close with my empty hands?
Can your eyes in mine see the mist of pain?
'Tis the sound of your voice that my heart demands,
And the crush of your arms and your lips again!

ALTAR FIRES

LOVE'S SPRING

The lilt of spring is in the air,
The ice-bound brook runs free,
The sky, as maiden eyes, is fair,
The birds sing happily.
The sun its warmth and glory showers
Alike on thee and me:
The winds call to the sleeping flowers—
My heart is calling thee.

The joy of life is brief as spring,
The sorrow dread and long;
Oh, why should my heart be hungering
For thee with the robin's song?
We have our youth, we have our love,
And the world is wide and free—
I give my soul to Him above,
But I give my heart to thee!

ALTAR FIRES

TELL ME TO-NIGHT

Tell me to-night whate'er your heart would say,
 While love is bright.
Wait not the dawn of yet another day!
Pleasure and wealth and gain—why, what are they?
Only a passing gleam—and then away
 Into the night.
Tell me to-night if aught your heart would say;
 For I must know.
Hope, like the sun, shines on us but a day,
Then follows night—forever and for aye.
Dearest of all, so lonely is the way,
 Wanting you so!

ALTAR FIRES

LOVE'S APPRAISEMENT

What matters it, dear one, that shadows lie
 Behind the light that sanctifies our day?
We cannot always find the smoother way,
 Or always smile, no matter how we try.
The storms and passions in the world's great heart
 But tend to glorify the after part.

So let us live within this blessed hour
 Since youth is sweet; for with old age the chance
To love and laugh, care-free, is gone; the power
 No longer ours to weave youth's bright romance.
So now, dear heart, naught in the world is true
 Except the golden sunlight, God and YOU!

ALTAR FIRES

SEPARATION

Tell me to-night all that your heart would say,
I want to know.

Wait not the dawn of yet another day,
Shadows of doubt behind the moonbeams play—
Gladden my life by loving while you may
Now, e'er you go!

Empty my hands—your own are warm and strong,
Make mine secure.

Kiss me to-night, the morrow may be long,
Let your dear thoughts into my being throng;
Make the amen that follows love's sweet song
Sacred and pure.

What if the morrow never dawn for me?
We may not know.

Then must to-night be all a life should be—
Kisses enough for all eternity,
Love deep as ocean binding you and me
Ere one must go!

Lift up your face where shines the moon above,
Radiant its light!

So must your heart enfold me in its love,
So must its light ne'er from my being move,
Making our parting in this hour to prove
Only good-night.

ALTAR FIRES

GIVE ME A KISS BELOVED

Give me a kiss, beloved,
A kiss just for friendship's sake;
For the story must be ended,
The old-time link must break.
To me the friend is dearer
Than all the world below—
Give me a kiss, beloved,
Before I let you go.

Give me a kiss, beloved,
For my heart is sad to-night;
I need your faith to keep me,
Your hand to lead me right.
I love you, Oh, I love you!
But you will never know;
Give me a kiss, beloved,
Before I let you go.

ALTAR FIRES

TO A FRIEND

So you've nothing to say to me, have you?
You have said all there is to say!
And your thoughts are abstracted and weary—
It is I who must smile and be gay.
And I've counted the hours till I saw you—
Have wished every minute away;
But you've nothing to say to me, have you?
You have said all there is to say!

There is much that my lips long to tell you,
But your eyes take the impulse away;
Have you nothing but old commonplaces
To brighten the hour-burdened day?
And what would you think if I told you
The thoughts that within me sway?
But you've nothing to say to me, have you?
HAVE you said all there is to say?

I have been so content in your friendship,
So warmed by the touch of your hand;
And now in this hour of our parting
I grieve that you don't understand;
For friendship 'twixt man and a woman
Exacts many tears for its pay—
So you've nothing to say to me, have you?
You have said all there is to say!

ALTAR FIRES

THE PAST

They tell me not to grieve, but to rejoice
In the blazing sunlight of to-day;
Nor e'er look back to trace the shadowed way
Dim thro' the years, dream-haunted by your voice.

And I must mourn your dead—forgotten quite;
Cremated in the heat of passion's fire;
And every throb of yearning or desire
Must die like day before the pall of night.

But you, in all your strong and wayward power,
Taught me to love you and the world despise.
Now in this hour I feel my heart arise
And make your teachings balance for your dower.

So 't is good-by, for nothing now remains
Of all our joy but lees of keen regret;
The warm, red sun of yesterday has set,
To-day is here—and I must meet its claims.

ALTAR FIRES

WHY IS IT SO?

Why is it so? I wonder if you know,
You, with a man's strange soul that shuts within
The strangest blending of romance and woe—
That leans toward pleasure but falls into sin.
You overstep the line with cool contempt
Of virtue's dictates—or a woman's heart.
From all that must be reaped are you exempt?
Or does the joy of sowing ease the smart?

What if I cared? What if a foolish pain
Cut deep into my pride because you fell
Where you should stand, or lost where you should
gain?

A woman's love tastes of both heaven and hell!
While I can crush the bitter clutch of grief
With youth's gay mask to hide pain in my eyes,
You may go free to seek a man's relief
From loving bondage that a woman ties.

But when the time shall come without our youth,
And face to face we question of our love,
Then you will feel the shiver of the truth
And know the test my heart was made to prove.
Yes, you will need me then, when you are old,
There'll be no fret of loving bondage then:—
Why wait until time tarnishes the gold
Of youth's pure confidence in God and men?

ALTAR FIRES

I'M TIRED, THAT'S ALL

Don't ask me to smile, my darling,
I'm weary, so weary to-night;
So tell me some pleasant story,
And my spirits will soon be bright.
But why is the room so darkened?
And why do your tear-drops fall?
I want to see everyone happy—
I'm tired, that's all.

Your hands cling to mine, oh, so fondly,
Their warmth gives me courage and life;
Your eyes look so pained and so troubled
I wonder if danger is rife.
Say it over again that you love me,
So sweet and sincere your words fall—
And life is so dear to me, sweetheart!
I'm tired, that's all.

So tired am I now and so sleepy;
I wonder if heaven is like this—
'T were surely no fairer, my darling,
Bereft of your voice and your kiss!
And would you forever forget me,
Were I now to answer God's call?
O, stay with me, sweetheart, nor sorrow,
I'm tired, that's all!

ALTAR FIRES

ORA E SEMPRE

May the hands he has kissed never fold but to bless
him,

And may fervent the prayer for his happiness be ;
May the lips he has kissed e'er be glad to caress him
Whate'er holds the future for him or for me.

For trials must come e'en in wealth's rare possession,
And illness o'ershadow the happiest way ;
But the eyes he has kissed in love's holy confession
Will smile in life's night-time as well as life's day.

May the love in my heart like a rose-bud in June time
Unfold to the sun of the mellowing years,
As lovely at eve as it was at love's noon-time,
Perfected by pain and the dew of our tears.

For suffering chastens the passion of loving
As fire tempers steel in the heart of its blaze.
The lilt of that love by my life I am proving,
With Faith at the helm o'er the perilous ways.

Our eyes will not always be bright with youth's spring-
time,
For winter must follow the beauty of spring ;
But the hands he has kissed in love's glorious ringtime,
Will point him to God, Who made sacred the ring.

ALTAR FIRES

LOVE'S MOMENTS

We've only a little while to stay
And the bright spots are so few ;
Let us snatch their sunshine while we may,
An hour of life—and then away
Forever and aye from you.
Forever and aye from love, sweetheart,
From hope and from joy I'll be—
For the claims of life hold us apart,
And the only bright spot is your heart
And the love you offer me.

The nectar of life in the golden glass
Shows not the dregs below :
Shall we take it and drink it or let it pass ?
If we drink we must drink to the lees : alas !
'T is better to let it go.
I'd have no bitter regrets to mar
The memory of hours with you—
For though you are near me or though you are far,
I will love you and trust you wherever you are,
So we'll break the glass in two.

The red wine flows from the shattered gold
Like the blood of my love so rare ;
Between us it streams like a barrier cold,
Our happiness ever to cling to and hold,

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And our hands are left empty and bare.
For the last faint ray of our hope is dead,
 But my hands in yours find home—
Ah, dear one, give me your lips instead,
Let them tell of the love that can ne'er be said
 In the dreary years to come.

ALTAR FIRES

OUR HOUR

Kiss me once! I would remember
YOU, in all this hallowed hour,
When our country's voice is calling,
And the women's tears are falling.
Let your dear lips, warm and tender,
To my own lips give the power
And the strength to smile. Remember
Hearts are breaking in this hour.

Kiss me once! The years hereafter
May be full of joy and laughter,
But this hour of death's close breathing
Must forever leave its chill.
Look into my eyes and see there
All the love I know to be there;
Let me smile as you are leaving
That you may think of me so—

There's the bugle . . . Hear it calling?
See, the women's tears are falling—
Kiss me! Kiss me once—and GO.

ALTAR FIRES

PRESENTIMENT

The beauty of the Orient country holds
No charm to me, my own, beside your face;
The depth of passion in your dear gray eyes
Tortures reserve until, worn out, it dies
And leaves me free love's offering to place
Upon the altar which your heart enfolds.

To-day the first faint chill of sombre clouds
Must augur of a future desolate:
I know no joy that round you does not cling,
And with you near my every care takes wing.
I love you, is it just that we should wait?
I love you, should we wrap our souls in shrouds?

If loving you is crime, then may I know
No virtue in this world. So dear you've grown
The skies become effulgent in your joy,
The day is drear when ills your life annoy;
If we could look ahead when years have flown,
Would we regret the seeds of love we sow?

Would you and I regret the past and prove
That our blind love had darkened present days?
What tho' the years shall shut the sun away?
They cannot take the light of yesterday:
And in our very sorrow I give praise
To that kind fate that taught us how to love.

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And so, dear love, while yet the twilight stays,
Take me within the shelter of your arms,
Again to lay my head on your dear breast,
Within this hour of parting there to rest:
And kiss me, dear, to still the dread alarms
That hang like clouds o'er all our future days!

ALTAR FIRES

MY FATHER

He was so ever gracious to mankind—

 The little child, the beggar at his door,
And e'en the miser, pouring o'er his gold,
 Received alike his faith from day to day.

And now that he is gone, I even find

 My harsher judgment checked to ponder o'er
The greater wisdom that his trust foretold;
 For all men mourned him when he passed away.

ALTAR FIRES

AND YET

The time has come when we must say good-bye;
Our dream of love is o'er, and you and I
Think now it will be easy to forget;
We can dismiss the past, I know, and yet—

Long since I've felt the parting of the ways;
Your smiling lips dissembling in their praise
Of little things we loved. I've no regret—
I am not sad,—I do not care, and yet—

Please look not at me with pain's chilling mask
Upon your face. I shall not call to task
The passion long since stilled, nor beg, nor fret;
My heart is dead to love, to you, and yet—

The grass is wet beneath my feet, the dew
Is falling fast. I turn my eyes on you
And tho' the burning tears my lashes wet
I am not sad,—'t is weakness, perhaps, and yet—

We meet to-night as strangers, you and I
Who once knew love in all its potency.
But go your way, I soon can you forget—
Love lies quite dead, 't is well for us to part, and
yet—

ALTAR FIRES

UNCONFESSED

I have listened to all nature's voices of song,
The soft, laughing brook and the full-throated bird;
I've listened and waited the weary day long,
But in all of the musical raptures I've heard
Not one strain has power or has passion to move you
Like the simple confession—I love you, I love you.

O, you who are over the great ocean wild,
Are your gray eyes still brooding o'er memories of
old?
When our cold hands clasped tensely—our traitor lips
smiled,
And we parted, both leaving our story untold?
By the dear land you tread, by the blest stars above
you,
I would you could know how I love you—I love
you!

ALTAR FIRES

APPRECIATION

Truth's light is in your eyes,
Steadfast and clear,
Full of love's mysteries,
Making them dear.
And in your grave respect
No thought is derelict;
Judgment so slow and wise
Must be sincere.

Harsh tho' you sometimes are
In candor's cause,
Never, lest trust you mar,
Rings false applause.
So, when your dear lips press
Mine with a long caress,
Love seems, with outspread wings,
O'er us to pause.

ALTAR FIRES

HIS MOTHER

I let him go with Youth still in his eyes—
 I let him go
Where lovely women laugh and men are wise.
Into the hard old grind I turned his feet
That life might fit him its demands to meet ;
 I loved him so.
When he came back I saw the Man-look there—
 And felt no joy.
To question this tall man I did not dare.
So, for a breath, we stood a length apart—
Then, eagerly, I caught him to my heart ;
 He was my Boy !

ALTAR FIRES

I TOLD YOU SO

I told you so!

And now, when pain demands its bitter part,
Why bow your head and take it thus to heart?
Before your grief I warned you to beware,
But you—you seemed too confident to care.
Now why lose faith and let your courage go?
Remember, long since this, I told you so.

I told you so!

I whispered of the eyes whose subtle gleam
Filled all your life and made home perfect seem;
I spoke of lips too red and full to crave
For one man's kiss. Such beauty could not save
Its charm for you—too brilliant was its glow.
Why did you not believe? I told you so!

I told you so!

My friendship for you prompted me to see
Her restless life which made its strange decree
Of secret joy. You looked so calmly on,
So good, so sure, the all-forgiving one,
My words sprang forth in all their bitter flow:
So blame ME if you must, I told you so.

I told you so!

But now, since she has gone and left you free,
With swift belief you turn anon to me,

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So broken and so pale beneath your smile
My heart turns cold, in just this little while
You feel the truth and rally from the blow.
I would have saved you this—I told you so.

I told you so!
And in your pain you look to me and ask
The way to turn, and such a grievous task
Must fall on one who knows, thro' love of you,
Just how to tell the false part and the true.
And in the years to come much joy you'll know—
I love you—tho' I should not tell you so.

ALTAR FIRES

UNRECONCILED

Speak not of yesterday, the buried past
Must ever quiet lie, and still and cold ;
The tears I shed, the longings and regret,
 Seemed far too bitter and too sharp to last.
Such poignant grief must loose its iron hold ;
 I cannot smile—since I cannot forget.

Speak not of yesterday, its gloom and chill
 Creep o'er my life and snatch away my sun.
I struggle to be brave—hope must not die,—
 But memories of the past their claims instill ;
Its loving, radiant day had but begun !
 And on its grave my youth and courage lie.

ALTAR FIRES

MY ROSE

My Rose, sweet Rose.
Gracefully tripping away she goes,
Light is her laughter, but lighter her toes ;
Sweet and inviting the glance that she throws
Over her shoulder at me, dear Rose—
Dear Rose!

My Rose, shy Rose.
Fain would I to you my love propose,
Only your saucy smile too plainly shows
How such a love would be brought to a close—
Deep tho' its passion and faithful, my Rose,
My Rose!

But Rose, Oh, Rose,
When soft around you the moonlight flows
And in your heart its serenity throws,
Think then of me as a love-token blows
From unseen lips to you, my Rose—
My Rose!

. ALTAR FIRES

THE TRAITOR

Cupid came to me in the long ago

And asked me to play in the game of love.

He seemed such a wee little sprite, you know,

That I could not refuse him and let him go.

So I joined in the game my own skill to prove.

We began with laughter and jests and fun,

And we matched our wits with keen delight.

We stopped not to reckon who lost and who won ;

In the barter of heart-throbs the truth we could shun

While we waged such a glorious fight.

But I soon caught the power of the challenge he sent

And my soul was the stake in this Love-game of
chance.

Every parry and thrust in our tournament

Stirred my blood to fire, for I knew he rent

With a master hand in each slow advance.

So I cautioned Cupid to play me fair,

But he smiled with eyes that knew Love's game thro'

To the bitter end and he did not care

Now the game was won, so he left me there

And was off for another maid to woo.

On my knees I begged for the soul I'd lost ;

Every other trophy he well might hold,—

ALTAR FIRES

But his young eyes laughed: I could count the cost
Thro' the years to come. Then to me he tossed
Just an empty heart—and the tale was told.

Oft since he has passed with his arching bow,
But beyond the reach of my longing cry.

Still I feel the sting of his arrows go
To the smarting wound of the long ago,—
And I bow my head till he passes by.

ALTAR FIRES

PHANTOMS

I do not know just what it could have been
That spoke of you out of the dormant past—
A strain of music, perhaps,—a breath of flowers
That brought you back with all the hallowed hours.
And storming o'er the present came at last
The old, old longing for your touch again.

O, I can smile and meet each budding day
With courage to go through until the night;
While those around me, in their happiness,
Make darker, far, the way in my distress.
But when the shadows come, it is my right
To seek the solitude—to grieve—and pray.

And know you, where you are, each hour is rife
With memories of you while there is life.
And when death comes—But no. See, I can smile
And sing and dance . . . But wanting you the while!

ALTAR FIRES

THE CROSS

'T is better so, perhaps, 't is better so,
That I should bear this cross while I am young.
To learn to look into men's eyes and know
The tragedy that lies behind their smile.
Yet must I feel that every song that's sung
Has tears behind its sweetness all the while?

Like Saint Helena, bearing up her cross
So patiently, maybe I, too, shall know
The beauty of unburdening the dross
Of life's late offering in this, my youth,
And have, from out the pain, rich blessings grow.
And know through years to come the eye of truth.

And so, 't is better, perhaps, my cross to bear
While I am young—but happy were the years
When laughing lips ne'er offered up a prayer,
And laughing eyes knew not the smart of tears.

ALTAR FIRES

MY BIRTHDAY

My birthday! Time, go back a little space!
Must all the pretty toys of yesterday
Be sadly stored within the sacred place
Where all the dreams of happy childhood play?

The dear old dolls of cloth and wax and wood
Accuse the hands that drop them, one by one,
Within the casket of my babyhood.
The lid must close before the coming sun

Of that maturity that does this day
Forbid the frolics of the long ago.
Or was it long ago? Or just a way
Adown the hours a little while or so?

ALTAR FIRES

OUR BOYS

They put on pride with their uniforms,
They took up grit with their guns;
From the calm of peace in the homeland,
To the throb of war with the Huns.
From the light and warmth of their favorite club,
To the line of the rank and file;
From the kiss of love with a trembling lip,
To the kiss of death—with a smile.

They took their youth as a bond to give
In reply to their country's call;
The shine of their names will forever live,
To be honored and loved by all.
Those who came back to heart and home
We know will understand
The grief and love for those who sleep
Within a foreign land.

ALTAR FIRES

HER PASSPORT

It was so strange a thing that she could smile :
 So many griefs were tugging at her heart
And begging for a place. Each little while
 She cautioned them in whispers to depart,
Lest lips and eyes should falter at their task
 And fail to do their bidding at the last.

But even in the whispering, her voice
 Lost nothing of its cheerful, sweet control.
She would not lay down arms. It was her choice
 They had left empty chambers in her soul.
Since she had set him free to go his way
 Why linger in a stormy yesterday?

So wonderful a thing her smile could be—
 With tears behind its glory. Like the sun
Caught laughing o'er the troubled waves at sea.
 O, she had loved him fondly! That was done
And blotted with the past. Alone was she.
 But where she went the world gave her a place
Because she wore a smile upon her face.

ALTAR FIRES

HE KISSED HER HANDS

He kissed her hands!
There, in the dim-lit hall, where other men
Had kissed her lips,
He paused as if to say a last good-night,
So boyish and sincere.
Before she knew quite his intent, she felt
The pressure of his fingers round her own
And then
He kissed her hands.

She'd had no thought of him before but in
A casual way.
His voice, perhaps, was softer than the rest,
His smile
A bit more sweet.
But never after he had gone away
Did aught within her being cry for him.
She just forgot until, perchance, he came—
All but that night
He kissed her hands.

But when the little silence fluttered down
Between them as they stood,
And she looked up to find his eyes on hers—
She caught her breath

ALTAR FIRES

To find her heart was really beating so.
 And when he bent
That sleek, young head of his above her hands
And his warm lips touched softly on her palms—
Another feeling, sweetly new, awoke
To sway her with the passion of its call.
 She felt she loved him when
 He kissed her hands.

ALTAR FIRES

LONG BEACH

A stretch of sandy beach lies smooth
 Beneath the darkening, evening sky.
A growing moon peeps through the clouds
 And shrouds itself in mystery.

The night-birds cry along the shore,
 The giant waves roll slowly in
And break with hissing, whitening spray,
 Receding noisily again.

The sombre clouds, grey-flecked and chill,
 Drift toward the moon and catch its light
To throw the pallid, ghostly gleam
 Across the darkness of the night.

As here upon the beach we stand
 And dream our dreams 'neath nature's spell,
No warning comes to tell our hearts
 That we are saying our farewell.

But let the ocean sing its song—
 In years to come we shall forget
We ever stood and listened here
 To all its sighings of regret.

ALTAR FIRES

WITHOUT YOU

So glorious the days—yet sad my heart.

I call your name and echos mock my cry.

I cannot think of you from home apart—

The little home we worked for, you and I.

It was so short a time to take from life

Full measure of its joy. We could not hear

In happiness like ours the threat of strife;

Nor could we feel the parting that was near.

For had we known it, every little thing

Would have been treasured since it was the last;

Each smile, each word—so worth remembering.

Each kiss a sacrament for kisses past.

Now morning dawns without you. All the day

I want you so in each remembered place.

I work the lonely, dragging hours away

With constant longing just to see your face.

When twilight comes—its shadows deep and black

Without your voice to help me find the light—

O, dearest, dearest, would you but come back

To hold me close and kiss me once good-night!

ALTAR FIRES

ADRIFT

I went away from home without a heart.

The heart of me was torn in little bits
And buried in the graves of those I loved.

And so I wandered from the fold alone
And looked at men with speculative eyes.

No wealth of purse was mine to arm my soul
With lovely hopes against the want of love.

No kindred put their tenderness on me
Like holy drops. Yet deep within my eyes
There burned the beacon for a human love.

And as I wandered out into the world,
Men turned and looked with warmest of
sympathy,
While women, love-wrapped, hurried on their way
And left me starved—I, who had always known
The solace of affection and a home.

So, as I gazed ahead toward life's gray road,
The flood-gates opened over my restraint;
Men, seeing, looked at once with keener zest
Than warmth of sympathy within their glance.
Their look had all the eager call for mate.

ALTAR FIRES

And elemental urge of youth and sex

Made me return their glance, but barring still
The yield of all that pride and birth had taught.

But lonely is the way, and dark—and long . . .
I hesitate—with speculative eyes.

ALTAR FIRES

SO DEAR HE IS

Father in heaven, so dear he is to me,
 So very dear!
Helpless am I to lead him unto Thee,
Laggard his feet in path of right would be;
Speak in his heart through nature's minstrelsy;
 Make him sincere!

Father of all, stretch out Thy rod of love
 Over his head.
Teach him Thy way—its beauty to him prove,
Life's petty sins set Thou his thoughts above,
Judgment suspend—Thy blessing from me move
 To him instead.

Weak is Thy child temptation to defy;
 Help him to go
Over rough ways when danger lurks near-by.
If we be judged by weakness there on high,
Give me his cross—for weaker far am I,
 Loving him so!

ALTAR FIRES

THE DEBUTANTE

The pale wine bubbles in the glass
Like amber shot with fire;
So clink with me and drink with me
To what we most desire.
May all the gifts be yours, my lass,
Of all the gods above,
For I'm in love with you,—alas!
But you're in love with Love.

The wine of hope is all astir
Within my veins to-night.
So smile with me and wile with me
The hours that yet are bright.
By every cross I bear for you
Devotion will I prove:
Oh, I'll love you my whole life through—
Though you're in love with Love.

Your lips are sweeter than the wine,
Your eyes are far more bright:
But for one kiss I'd give the bliss
Of countless years to-night.
The soul of me through love of you
Is close to God above.
Child, to your innocence be true
While you're in love with Love!

ALTAR FIRES

NIGHT

It creeps upon us unaware,
Mysterious with sleep:
We feel its potency of rest
As trees soft good night speak.
Each firefly lights its little torch
And on its mission goes,
To see that every flower's head
Is bent in sweet repose.

A drowsy dark enfolds us close;
The ocean's distant roar
Is singing strange, wild lullabys
Unto the wave-washed shore.
We lay aside the fret of day—
Our troubles we dismiss;
And sleep drops down on silent wings
To bless us with her kiss.

ALTAR FIRES

THE OPTIMIST

Laugh with me, quaff with me, make merry chaff with
me,

Fill up your glasses and raise them with mine,
Drink to the nearest one, aye, and the dearest one,
I give you Pleasure, and pledge it with wine.

Think not of sorrow, nor yet of to-morrow,
Bask in the sun of the Present's bright smile;
Woes will come, foes will come, what, no one knows
will come,
Laugh while you may and make merry the while.

What is ahead of us, who will instead of us
Revel to-morrow, light-hearted and free?
Warm life is calling us, beauty enthraling us,
Now is the time, lads, for you and for me.

We've time without measure, let's give it to pleasure;
My secret's are yours and your secrets are mine;
Up with your glasses, lads, drink to the lasses, lads,
I give you Love, and I pledge it with wine.

ALTAR FIRES

THE HOME-LAND

Skies are sunny clear above me,
Birds are merry in their lay,
Tender hearts are near to love me
On the rough, uncertain way;
But the path is long and dreary
For my laggard feet to roam;
Of the garish day I'm weary—
Father, Father, take me home.

I can hear the ceaseless laughter
Of the world so gay and light;
Pleasure—with no grim hereafter,
Day—without an endless night;
And the babble of the living
Mocks those in their silent tomb;
While my heart is yet forgiving,
Father, Father, take me home.

Lips are selfish of their kisses
If I hunger for their touch;
Loving words my sad heart misses
If I want them over-much;
Like a child grown tired of playing,
For Thy solace overcome,
Lest my feet from Thee be straying,
Father, Father, take me home.

ALTAR FIRES

THE LOST NOTE

I listened to the thrilling of a flute
Mid cornet's notes and trombone's solemn bass;
The shrilling fifes led on the dancing race
Of skipping measure as I listened, mute.
I heard the drums—their constant rumble wrote
Upon my heart a vague and dull unrest;
For in the crash of blended music's zest
I felt in some vague way, a missing note.
The passion of its call was gay and flaunting,
Behind the grandest chords I felt the strain
Of sympathy suspended, like the wanting
Of that low cry that warns the heart of pain.
As in a boyish choir one hears the sweetness
But sung as children sing—above the heart;
It's tuneful, like the birds, but so apart
From human love, that goes to make completeness.

I looked into your eyes, your eyes of brightness,
I sought your soul—but in your steadfast gaze
I caught but admiration and the praise
Of witty lips, that injured by their lightness.
I touched your hand, your quiet fingers proving
A swift response unto my mute appeal;
And yet I wondered if you, too, could feel
The broken bond,—the missing note of loving.

ALTAR FIRES

But now the music's crash dies down to quiet,
And one low strain from violin comes streaming
In sobbing breath with love and pity gleaming,
And all my youth's swift blood is running riot.
You bend your head—I feel your warm breath near,
The violin sings on in saddened sweetness;
And with the music's passionate completeness
Your lips touch mine,—the missing note is here.

ALTAR FIRES

UNBLESSED

Oh, God, here on my knees, I pray to Thee!

My heart is sore beset, my empty hands
Are reaching heavenward in their earnest plea.

In that rare power of Thine that understands
The fret and worry of the long, dark way,
Forgive Thy child an erring yesterday.

But point the way, Oh, Father, and my feet

Will blindly go—and leave the rest to Thee.

My starving soul within is incomplete

Without Thy blessing, long denied to me.

A stranger oft to prayer, dear God above,

Make me to-morrow holy by Thy love!

ALTAR FIRES

BROKEN FRIENDSHIP

Last night! and yet it seems so long ago

I wonder if I ever called you friend,
And shared with you life's pleasures and life's woe.

Our friendship was so deep, so kind, so true—
In light or shade I always turned to you

And found relief and comfort in your smile:
And yet, in just this bitter little while

Distrust and doubt our faith and love transcend.

Why could we not o'erlook the few defects
Which nature gives, nor spares their glaring shame?
A friend who's true another's faults ejects.

Our confidence exchanged was far from wise,
For failings grow when brought before the eyes
And bear ill fruits for both one's self and friend;
A man will e'er his own mistakes defend,
And in that same defence will blindly flame,

The rose is fair, as was our trust's belief;
But if that perfect flower we rudely rend
Because we see a stain upon its leaf,
Where is the flower we erstwhile called so fair?
Scattered and dead, in all its beauty rare:
And thus it is with too exacting friends;
Regret for what is done ne'er makes amends—
A friend can't stand in judgment o'er a friend.

ALTAR FIRES

Far better were it if this after part

Were pain and storm and tears as follow love,
And not this dull unrest within the heart.

One little explanation left unsaid,
And yet we stood there stern and mute instead.

I would I'd never shared your friendship's trust
And learned its worth to see it burn to dust,
Misunderstood in what it failed to prove.

ALTAR FIRES

I NEED THEE

Take Thou my hand, my Father, take my hand,
 Lead me away in safer paths to tread;
Danger is here, in subtle beauty flowing,
 Warmly alive, with all enticements glowing;
Teach me belief in all that Thou hast said,
 Help me Thy ways of right to understand.

I am alone and longing for Thy blessing,
 Make me to feel all confidence in prayer;
Life is not sweet with savor in the living,
 Loving or loved, forgiven or forgiving,
In every joy I feel a want is there—
 Is that want Thou, and is the joy confessing?

ALTAR FIRES

OUR GAME

We are playing a game of loving,
How long is the game to last?
We have matched our skill and had our fill,
And the charm of the sport is past;
Is there aught that's amiss in the pastime,
Now the gamut of pleasure is run?
Was either one playing in earnest,
Or were both of us playing for fun?

Do you wish the game forgotten,
With the lilt of its laughter and fears?
Let us give and take—just for friendship's sake,
A kiss, to forget the tears.
And let us return the tokens,
You say it is easily done;
Ah, but one was contending in earnest,
Tho' the other was playing for fun.

You ask if the game is over—
Why, to me it was but begun;
I thought that you would be sorry, too,
Tho' the sport was just for fun.
All we cared was to fill the moments,
But we've wasted the whole day long:
Had we known one was playing in earnest,
Would the game have been free from wrong?

ALTAR FIRES

We are both of us mute at parting,—
It is hard to say good-by.
As you take my hand, do you understand
Which is victor, you or I?
But your lips have been schooled to laughter,
No matter how luck did run:
But which played the love-game in earnest,
And which of us played it for fun?

ALTAR FIRES

WHEN I WAS A CHILD

When I was a child I thought the lips
 Were made but to smile in life's happy sun :
 And laid them by in my youthful bliss :
And I counted my blessings, every one,
I knew not, I knew not that lips could kiss
 Till the passion and gladness of life were gone—
 When I was a child.

When I was a child I thought the eyes
 Were to see the world in its splendid years
Of arrogant bud that lifts and cheers
 Every soul to wish to be good and kind.
I knew not, I knew not eyes could go blind
 With the sting of pain and the smart of tears—
 When I was a child.

When I was a child I thought my heart
 Was for praising God in His home above ;
I bent the knee every night to prove
 That my soul rejoiced in its youthful trust ;
I knew not, I knew not that woman must
 Heed the call of a heart in its first great love—
 When I was a child.

ALTAR FIRES

A PRAYER

Dear God, at night I do not kneel
Beside my bed to pray—
I ask not that Thy blessing rest
Upon me thro' the day.
I make no claim upon Thy grace
That it may shelter me—
And yet when earthly comforts fail,
I always turn to Thee.

The church that's sacred to Thy word—
I am a stranger there;
Tho 'all Thy handiwork I love,
I voice it not in prayer.
But let life's troubles come to me,
No matter how or when,
My soul cries out alone to Thee;
I feel I need Thee then.

I know no framing for the words
My heart cries out to say,
For all my life Thy heavenly grace
Has seemed so far away.
But wilt Thou hear the stranger voice
That bares my soul to Thee?
And wilt Thou send from out Thy heart
A gift of love for me?

ALTAR FIRES

My petty griefs I've borne alone,
Nor to Thee dared to bring;
But in my keener anguish, Lord,
Unto Thy cross I cling.
And may its sacred arms uplift
My erring soul to Thee,
Transformed in blessed purity
Throughout eternity.

ALTAR FIRES

VIRGINIA

Virgin in soul and white in mind,
Child of the God of all mankind,
May your sacred lips and your baby eyes
Teach my weary heart where grief's solace lies.

Worry and care with their haunting cry
In my tired brain as each day goes by
Turn to joy and peace as I watch you play,
And your happy laugh steals the heart away.

Oh, I pray thro' my boundless love for you
That the God above will keep you true
To the call of life that knows no pain
In the harvest's sweep of the year's rich gain.

And God's sacrament in your gentle touch
On my life that is restless over-much,
Makes me cry to Him to keep you good
In the beautiful strength of your babyhood.

ALTAR FIRES

THE SUMMER GIRL

She is only a summer girl, I thought,
As I called her fair and pressed her hand;
Too pretty and young to understand
All the pain of life—love is yet untaught;
Sweet and content and as flawless as pearl—
Just a gay little, stray little summer girl.

We walked by the sea when the moon was bright
While the night was warm and the winds were still;
And I felt in my veins a tender thrill
So I took her hand with a lover's right.
But the scorn of her mirth with impetuous whirl
Made me laugh at and chaff at the summer girl.

In the sunshine where gold in her hair I could trace
She would stand by my side in her fresh, laughing
youth;
And the heart in me hungered to tell her the truth,
As I held her dear hands and looked down on her
face.
But she, with a smile and a toss of a curl
Was a shy little, spry little summer girl.

But there came a time when the cold winds blew,
And summer was going—alas! too soon;
I had learned to love zephyrs and gentle moon—

ALTAR FIRES

I had found many things fair and sweet that I knew.
I had learned to love, with her beauty and twirl
My coy little, toy little summer girl.

I told her I'd miss her and begged her to say
We need never part in the long years to come:
But with lips on my lips yet she bade me to roam
And leave it to chance if we crossed in our way.
And I know—now I know that hope did not unfurl
In my queer little, dear little summer girl.

Years passed. One day in a city street
A dreary procession passed solemnly by;
I sorrowed for those who were sad, nor knew why.
But I followed the mourners with slow, aimless feet.
As I gazed through the throng toward the altar's
bright gleam,
The face of my summer girl rose like a dream.

And ere the sweet vision could pass from my mind
I found myself gazing upon her—once gay,
Now white and so still in her casket she lay,
And others were sobbing whom she'd left behind.
Mid the turbulent sorrow of life's dreary whirl
God had given his peace to my dead summer girl.

ALTAR FIRES

LOOK DOWN INTO MY EYES

Look down into my eyes to-night—deep down,
So that my soul to your dear soul shall speak.
Let but this silent message pass between
Ere lips from lips the parting kiss must seek.

This is no time, my own, to grieve and cry
That fate has cheated us of our just due;
It is enough that I can hold your hand
Before you go away—and comfort you.

For parting-time is older than the sun;
And lover's grief is part of life's great plan.
So smile, my love, and tell me we have won.
Look long into my eyes—and be a man!

ALTAR FIRES

NIGHT WHISPERS

The night is warm—she feels the fragrant air
And draws a breath that thrills deep thro' her veins,
So full it is of all of life that's fair;
And all the depth her woman's soul contains
Breathes out its glow in soft, sweet cadence there.

Her heart is free as is the gentle wind
That murmurs in the tree-tops o'er her head;
Relentless fate is often over-kind—
And to her ne'er a warning word has said
That love full-blown means love to-morrow dead.

ALTAR FIRES

EARTH-BOUND

Oh, my Father, do Thou spare Thy child
Yet a little while to live the day
To the evening's close. The morning wild
Full of youth's vain dreams has passed away;
And the noon, in all its lurid glow,
Taught its bitter lessons long ago.
Standing here, upon the brink of eve,
Let me live to trust Thee—and believe.

Let me live to place upon Thy throne
That bright star of love Thy children give—
For I wandered from the fold alone.
Till I find the Homeland, let me live!
Father, I am now so near the night,
Give me strength to battle for the right:
Let my tired feet no longer roam—
Father, bless me, ere Thou call me Home.

ALTAR FIRES

I SHALL NOT PASS THIS WAY AGAIN

Let the wine be red, let the wine be old,
I shall not pass this way again;
Youth's but a day when all is told,
Old age is long and slow and cold;
Now my blood is warm and my step is bold,
So my glass of wine to the lees I'll drain,—
For I shall not pass this way again.

Let your eyes meet mine with a glance that's kind,
I shall not pass this way again;
And all of the years I leave behind
I shall count as lost if they did not bind
Both our lives with a joy that is hard to find,
Joy made secure by Love's golden chain;
For I shall not pass this way again.

Let your song be light, let your song be gay,
I shall not pass this way again;
Sing the cares and the heartaches all away,
Let us live in the NOW, not the yesterday,
For to-morrow's dawn may be chill and gray.
Give me measure of love for each measure of pain,—
For I shall not pass this way again.

ALTAR FIRES

THE YOUNG WIFE

Dear little girl with the sad young eyes,
Why grieve in your youth that an idol raised
On your girlhood pedestal shattered lies,
By your woman's wit justly now appraised?
An idol can love and then hasten away—
But the love of a husband lasts more than a day.

Did you think the lover would last for aye,
With the soft caress in his ardent eyes?
Has the husband now laid the cloak away,
And shown you the man in a different guise?
He is young and sincere. O, I pray, let him be!
Don't encourage deceit and a feigned gallantry.

Maybe, who knows, in his big, boyish heart,
He misses the playmate of love-making days!
The solemn young wife is of mystery part,
With her great wistful eyes and her strange little
ways.
He's been petted, like you, by a mother's fond smile:
Take him just as he is and be patient awhile.

Little girl, little wife, while it's Spring in your life,
Be content with the BOY, for he loves you in truth.
There is time, ample time, when a measure of strife
Will bring tenderness forth—at the cost of his
youth.

ALTAR FIRES

But life teaches these lessons thro' heartaches and
tears;

Learn to laugh in the Spring ere Life's Winter ap-
pears .

Time will come, little girl, when grave sorrows will
trace

Troubled lines round his mouth and his cheerful
blue eyes:

And the look of the MAN in your husband's dear face
Will arise o'er the grave where his dead boyhood
lies.

In the heart of the woman God gave him to hold!

ALTAR FIRES

CONTRARINESS

My eyes admire all beauteous things in life
Without reserve or stint of spoken praise;
My courage shuns no battle or no strife
When you stand not at parting of the ways.
But with you near my eyes grow selfish, shy
Of admiration voiced—so weak am I.

I often bend and touch the silver stream
With eager lips to feel its cool repose;
Among fair blooms I sit full oft and dream
With cheek close pressed to clematis or rose;
But your dear mouth, with all its power to sway,
I fear to kiss—and give my heart away.

I love the sunshine with its happy gleams
Of glad, warm gold o'erspreading earth and sky;
I love the moonlight with its softer dreams
That fold me round with holy mystery;
My heart to you alone of all the rest
Withholds confession—and I love you best.

ALTAR FIRES

TWO LOVES

You and I—just you and I;
Love like ours ne'er reasons why,
While youth's sunshine drowns the cry
Of death and pain and misery.

You or I—which, you or I?
It is time that one must try
To fling aside the sullied tie
That makes our love a mockery.

You, not I—'t is you, not I
Who laughs to scorn the woman's cry
For love uplifted, lest it die
And breaks her heart in her good-bye.

ALTAR FIRES

TO —————

Dearie, dearie, life has grown so cold,
So empty for the constant want of you :
Lonely hours and haggard days and old—
My heart, across death's claim, to you is true,
It reaches out for all you meant to me
In love's short hour of life's eternity.

Dearie, dearie, can you ever know,
All the pain, the mockery of life,
Since you went away, so long ago?
All the battle with myself, the strife
To feel God knew 't were best for you and me
To call you first in death's grim tragedy?

Life around me, every little place,
Breathes of you and holds me with your power ;
Haunted, dreamlike, by your voice, your face.
Death I fear not, since I feel your right
To guide me through the darkness to the light.

ALTAR FIRES

FORSAKE HIM NOT

He is Thy child, O, God,—Thy child to-day
As in the years long gone when Thou didst breathe
Thy hallowed life within his baby frame,
And give him power to live and power to pray—
And power to suffer, too, and power to grieve
In days to come, as now. So, since his heart
Is hardened by the stab of Fortune's hand,
Into his soul Thy peace and love impart.
Guide Thou his thoughts—and make him understand.
Bitter he stands on life's uncertain way—
God of my fathers, teach him how to pray!

ALTAR FIRES

THRU THE RAIN

I love you so, I love you so to-night!

The steady rain is slashing on the pane—
The winds, let loose, are howling in their might;
I am alone—and wanting you again.

The glitter of these luxuries of mine
Offend my eyes since you have gone away:
The little wooded spot I've made my shrine
Where you and I declared our love one day.

Why was I not content with love and you?
Why did I reach for what my heart denied?
Life offers nothing—nothing that is true
Your arms dear fold, your tender kiss beside.

I want the fleck of moonlight on the sea—
I want your lips—your eyes' impassioned light.
Beloved, thru the rain, come back to me,
I love you so—and want you so to-night!

ALTAR FIRES

MY HEART IS LIKE A HARP

My heart is like a golden harp attuned
And waiting for your hand to sweep its strings
To wake the wild, glad music of its love.
Arion's lyric song, Apollo's lyre
Could bring forth strains with less of magic fraught
Than could your fingers, sweeping o'er the chord
Of love's desires half sleeping, unfulfilled.

My heart is like a harp, and in its keep
There slumbers passion, sympathy and grief,
With love's eternal constancy of joy.
So when your fingers, love-tipped, touch its strings,
The soul of music will give forth its song
And kiss the lips of harmony—and you.

ALTAR FIRES

GIVE ME THE WEST

Give me the West with the lurid glow
Of flagrant sun and the restful blow
Of sweeping grass o'er the boundless fields
Where good mother earth such rich harvest yields.

Give me the West where the broncos dance
To the cut of a spur in a bold advance,
And the glimmer of steel in a practiced hand
Makes man bow to a law he can understand.

Give me the West where the heart is light
As the silver stars in an azure night;
And the soul is as free as the birds that fly—
What a place to live! What a place to die!

ALTAR FIRES

THE CALL OF YOU

The red of my lips and the shine of my eyes
Are just for you.

The depth of my soul where love's secret lies
Is just for you.

The beat of my heart and its passion's flame
Are aroused by your lips as you speak my name,
For no other call can be just the same
As the call of you.

ALTAR FIRES

GIVE ME THE GLASS

Give me the glass till I fill it with laughter
Deeply imprisoned in amber-hued wine;
Fling off the cloak of gloom! Let the hereafter
Look to itself, for the present is mine.
Mine are the hours of this night's happy musing—
Mine to be gay with the youth that is mine;
Each of our lives is of each of our choosing—
Give me the glass till I fill it with wine!

ALTAR FIRES

FORGET YOU, DEAR?

Forget you, dear? Well, yes, when sky and sea
Forget to meet and kiss before the day;
When life is woe and death is happiness.

When every vital part of me is still
And lies there, unresponsive, 'neath your kiss.

Then, should you go from out my heart's recess,
I should forget to grieve with you away,

As if the world had given a boon to me
In leaving me alone. And only this

Can soothe the pain—when there's your place to fill.

ALTAR FIRES

HER REWARD

All day she went about her drugging work ;
No smile was on her lips tho' baby hands
Were fretting at her skirts and asking alms
Of pats and kisses which she could not shirk.
She did not sing—the clatter of the pans
Too jarring was to blend with music's charms.

So toiled she in the heat. And all day long
Within her heart, grown numb with too much pain,
She loved the man who married for a home.
Romance forgotten was—'Twas she alone
Who sought its thrill to woo back youth again ;
The man ne'er made a move to right the wrong.

At night he came to taste the luscious meal
Her worn hands had prepared, and round him shied
The sweet, clean children, lending home their peace.
But ate he hungrily, with scarce a word :
And opposite, his wife's low voice he heard
But dimly, for his thoughts had sought release
In pipe and paper. And the woman sighed.

She watched him later on their flower-decked porch
Absorbed in thought—and so she stole away
To put the babes to bed. Then by the light
She took the mending and with tired eyes

ALTAR FIRES

Spied out the holes, as one who vainly tried
To fill a gap that e'er yawned empty quite.

One word would be enough—one little word
Of praise for tasty food or dainty cloth;
Some hold to cling to underneath the froth
That life has offered her these weary years.
Such dull routine found no relief in tears—
Joy seemed now at an end—not just deferred.

And all she asked of life was one short hour
At twilight's glow to sit beside the man
Her heart had chosen in youth's first sweet call:
To hear his voice give gratefully its dower
Of worthy praise for work that left her wan.
To hear him say "I love you!"—that was all.

ALTAR FIRES

DOUBTS

So much I've borne. God willed that I should meet
The thorns of life before I plucked the rose.
Rough was the way where trod my baby feet,
Stern the demands my youth's first strength to greet.
Oh, since I've struggled for the night's repose,
Let it come now—before I face defeat!

So much I've hoped. When darkest shadows lay
Over my path and shut away my sun,
I've tried to smile, e'en thru my tears, and pray
Grieving, their balm would drive the hurt away;
Trusting that battles lost, instead of won,
Would, at the last, a blessing for me say.

And I have wept. Is there, in that white pain
Aught of a joy surrendered, unfulfilled?
Is there a peace beyond this world to gain
After the heart has ceased its fitful strain?
What is the price, when passion's fires are stilled
That we can hope for, that our souls can claim?

So much I've prayed. So hard has been the blight
Of every wish that crashed to earth. Alone,
Groping my way, I've tried to see the light
In that dim future which we claim as right—
We who have fought and lost—instead of won.

ALTAR FIRES

THE PRICE

I never dreamed I could be so alone
And feel your presence near. War's toss of dice
Has taken toll of each and every one—
And you, dear one, have paid your bitter price.

It would be better far had you gone blind
Than left to wander, groping out your way
With seeing eyes, yet lost to home and kind;
Your mind deaf to my call—to what I say.

I cannot bear to have you look at me
With those dear eyes that cannot sense my smile;
To have you here within my arms, to be
Yet muttering of other things the while.

If you've forgotten home and me, and years
Bring nothing back,—may God then set you free.
Better by far on your dead face my tears,
Than have you live and not remember me!

ALTAR FIRES

THE TEST OF SACRIFICE

You stand beside me now, my love—my love!
So silent, tho' it is our parting-time,
When proof of every vow should beg for speech.
I'm waiting here within your arms' slow reach.
Why do you pause before that kiss sublime?
That last, long kiss that shall our union prove.

What I have given to you I can't regret.
For love like mine no sacrifice is great
Before the storm-tossed sea of your desire.
Yet something holy stays mid passion's fire,
To chasten and subdue me as I wait
To hear you say you never can forget.

You stand so silent now. Our souls are bare
Before each other's eyes—and you must go
And leave me here to pay a woman's price,
The debt life claims for loving sacrifice;
The shackles of a bondage man can't know.
And woman meets it smiling—tho' unfair.

Why stand you so? Is there no word to say
Of all the things we dreamed of, you and I?
No vow to make? No promises to prove
Your whispered words to me thro' nights of love?
And is this parting-time a real good-bye?
God bless you, then—and speed you on your way!

ALTAR FIRES

SURRENDER

'Twas when I saw you first. Across the grass
Your cool gray eyes took up the fire of mine.
It came to pass
As miracles oft come on drab day's heels,
Glowing, sublime.
The haughty world within my singing heart
A crumbled mass became before your voice;
Ambitions, dreams,—the whole creative art
Of gray-dim years
Died down before that love. A moment's choice
From out the joys of life—from out its tears.

ALTAR FIRES

UNEASY HOURS

Oh, heart of mine—Oh, woman's heart of mine,
Why do you crave to leave upon men's lives
The flash of you? Be but content to shine
Unselfishly. The power you have that strives
To rouse swift passion's flame must die with youth.
Far better touch with tenderness men's lives—
Love's lasting truth.

Your restless moods—so fitfully they sleep
A touch, a glance, a word will set them free.
And for the sunset years no store you keep.
From out this youth's wild madness save for me
A saner vision when my eyes shall know
No lure. I want ahead to see
Where safe to go.

ALTAR FIRES

FAREWELL

Over our love and our joy and our pain ;

Farewell.

You've loved me and kissed me—but never again.

Farewell.

The days of our madness and nights of our bliss—

How little we thought they would bring us to this!

But I've looked into Heaven with every kiss—

And Hell.

Back to the grind and the fret and demand ;

Farewell.

So we bob up and down as Fate holds out her hand.

Farewell.

But we've danced on the way to the scaffold of MUST

And we've bathed in sincerity, passion and trust,

As we picked love's best flowers ere all wearied by dust

They fell.

And, perhaps, after all such a parting is kind ;

Who can tell?

But with sobs I am mute—and with tears I am blind

At farewell!

ALTAR FIRES

THEIR FAITH IN ME

They had such faith in me, my dear ones did:

I've stood and watched them going, one by one,
Into the Land that seems so far away.

I've lingered by them, helpless, while they slid
Gently away—forever to be gone—

And all my yearning could not make them stay.

Their faith in me was such a blessed thing!

To think I should fall short in that last hour
And stand by, tortured, while they looked to me

To use the knowledge born of love to bring
Their ebbing life-tide back to all its power.

Oh, why was not God's wisdom given to me

To meet that trust within those dying eyes
And ease them sweetly down in their last sleep?

I, too, with them have known Gethsemane—
To hold a loved one close, while death defies

The warmth my arms would in that dear form keep!

So, after all, when that last hour shall come,

And dear ones stand at parting of the ways—
A greater Presence has the master hand.

For with the kiss of death all pain is gone.
And for the grieving of the one who stays

The balm of time will make him understand.

ALTAR FIRES

TO —

You have gone—and I've tasted the wormwood that lies
In each cup of our pleasure thru life;
You have gone—and the sunshine has died from the
skies

Like our courage in battle with strife.
Oh, it's not quite the poor, lonely heart that you leave
Where the pain is the hardest to bear;
If you'd not gone away with a smile while I grieve:
It's the thinking how little you care!

You have gone and the tears creep up hot in my eyes;
Eyes longing to look on your face.
You have gone—and the future so desolate lies,
Where you have no thought and no place.
I have crushed back my sobs while I waved you
farewell;
I have tried to be brave and be fair.
But I love you! I love you! My lips long to tell.
You would smile—it's how little you care!

ALTAR FIRES

YOU GAVE ME VIOLETS

You gave me violets and now, whene'er their perfume
steals

Soft o'er my sense with sweet recall of long-
forgotten rest,

I think of one moon-silvered eve, a night for love in
quest,

When you and I stood hand in hand and pledged
love's sacred seals.

You gave me violets, and in that moon-enchanted hour,
They nestled close against my heart and breathed
their scented life

Upon us like an incense—ah, we knew not then of
strife—

But looked upon the future's scroll and trusted to
its dower.

We stood content upon the sands, where lapped the
small, bright waves,

And deep within your dear, gray eyes I saw the love-
light glow ;

I wondered why such perfect joy was given me to know
When in so many other lives lay green and hungry
graves.

I held the blossoms to my face and you, in swift delight,
Pressed your warm cheek against my own and in
your man's quick way

ALTAR FIRES

You drew my soul to meet your lips where love's confession lay,
And sanctified that lover's kiss you gave and took that night.

So while the silver water breathed its passion to the moon,

We pledged our troth—a sacred vow that we would e'er be true;

You kissed the drooping little flower that I had given to you

And said our perfect, rosy love would never lose its bloom.

And now, to-night, I think how keen was all that first delight;

The shadows that around me creep are grim with memories dense,

A contrast to that sunny past with all its love intense,
As lightning differs from the snow—or wrong is far from right.

There is a mist of tears to-night between the moon and me;

The future's dower has been but pain that seared an empty life;

And I, who once had smiled in faith above a world of strife,

Now look with dim and longing eyes across a lonely sea.

ALTAR FIRES

I feel as if the laughing world had closed its fickle
doors

And shut within its callous heart all sunshine and
all love,

While I, alone, stand cold without beneath the stars
above

That must see you, a wanderer, on distant, foreign
shores.

Alone I stand upon the shore and in my trembling
hands

I clasp a bunch of violets, all sweet with fragrant
dew;

Their scented breath recalls the past and makes me
think of you—

And how we stood and pledged our vows one eve
on these same sands.

Oh, you were full of youth and fire, perhaps you did
not know

The lure that lay beyond our love, beyond our lips'
first kiss.

And maybe now you've learned it well and know the
truth of this—

That men must fight to hold their own wherever
they may go.

And women must e'er pay the price in heart-ache and
in tears!

Oh, lovely flowers, the scent of you sweeps all the
years away

ALTAR FIRES

And makes me feel again your arms and hear your
deep voice say :

“I love you, dear. I love you, dear.” Ah, how the
memory sears !

I hold the violets to my breast and crush them to my
face—

The purple blooms, so dewy soft, so full of long ago.

I wonder if in some far land you'd greet our pledge-
flower so—

And would it on your heart, as mine, its stirring
memory trace.

But then that other grief steals in and kills the prompt-
ings sweet ;

That other lesson you have taught and written out
in pain.

And in this hour that I had hoped to see joy smile again

I stand and battle with the life you made me think
complete !

You gave me violets, and now of all the flowers I
know,

I shun their fragrance and their bloom so freighted
with the past.

Why was it that I did not know such joy could never
last ?

Why was it, in the first, sweet youth, I learned to
love you so ?

ALTAR FIRES

MY MOTHER

Kind she always was. She understood
All my young life held of dark and light;
Took she nothing—gave she only good,
That my youth might blossom without blight.
Tender was she always. Oft I knew
As the years rolled by, the sterner way:
Life's intenser shadows round me drew
Doubts all new that threatened Hope's bright ray
Held out by her hand. She felt my pain
Just as keen as I—thru love of me.
Loss to her meant joy if 't were my gain;
Sacrificed she all—and cheerfully.
In maturer years, when deeper ties
Welded us together by their woe—
Grief grown homely, sharper tragedies,
Reaped unkindly where I did not sow—
Then that mother-instinct, always true,
Felt with me the keenness of my pain:
Idols fallen, ne'er to build anew,
Castles shattered, reared too soon in Spain.
Felt with me, yet pointed out the way
Toward the sunshine and life's saner view.
Knowing when to kiss and what to say
That each thought might broaden as it grew.

ALTAR FIRES

When the faith within my heart lay still,
 Stunned by Life's hard lesson driven home,
And the struggle up the doubt-strewn hill
 Seemed too endless to attempt alone,
Then I turned to her whose mother-heart
 Felt the turnstile of my woman's soul
Keener, perhaps, than I. And with the art
 Of her blessed wisdom, knew the goal
Where to point my feet. And in that hour
 When Love came forth to claim me as the price,
Bravely did she smile and give as dower
 Both her blessing and her sacrifice.

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